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Romantic Nature Bites Back: Adorno and Romantic Natural History

Theresa M. Kelley

This paper addresses the possibility of Romantic freedom and contingency as a surprising consequence of the work of natural history in Romantic culture. My understanding of the Romantic concept of contingency takes its cue from Jon Klancher's assessment of the movement of mind that took William Godwin from the rule of necessity in his *Enquiry concerning Political Justice* to contingency in a later essay titled 'Of History and Romance' (Klancher 28–33). As I read the path of Godwin's replacement of necessity with contingency, it infuses the latter term with a sense of openness toward a future that would be made available by sudden, unexpected shifts in genres, events, or figurative language that constitute the possibility of freedom in history, and in Romanticism. I argue that natural history, and in particular botany as the most widely practiced and popular branch of natural history during this period, is the form of Romantic nature that bites back at efforts to constrain its internal as well as literary resistance to fixed identities and schemas. For reasons that I hope the path of my argument will make clear, I route this inquiry via Theodor Adorno's *Negative Dialectics* because its contest with Hegelian dialectics opens an imaginative space for thinking about Romantic natural history and figurative poetics.

I begin with a caution: Adorno's account of 'natural history' hardly offers a felicitous approach to Romantic natural history. For at the end of the section of *Negative Dialectics* that deals with this topic, Adorno explains succinctly that what he means by 'natural history' is a history in which 'devouring and being devoured' is the only game in town. This view of natural history as the simultaneous rather than sequential work of natural selection, Adorno suggests, meets its match (and more) in Hegel, where human history is identified with 'the progressing mastery of nature' (*Dialectics* 355). In part on Marx's behalf, Adorno insists that although the 'law' of nature looks inevitable, it is so only because capitalist production would have it so. Whereas social Darwinists take up this

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position seriously or perhaps naively; Marx takes it up ironically, hoping to make its negativity the site from which it might be possible to void or empty out the view of nature that would appear to authorize the hungry capitalist's consumption of workers and the means of production. With an allied suspicion of claims derived from figures of natural or organic life, Adorno warns against seeing all history as nature; all nature as history (359). Echoing Walter Benjamin's view of history and nature in *The Origin of German Tragic Drama* (224–226), Adorno observes that when nature is said to be history, the outcome is decay, ruin, passing, or already dead. So much for natural history.

And yet, perhaps not. In the larger section to which this brief coda is attached, titled 'World Spirit and Natural History: An Excursion to Hegel' in the English translation, Adorno argues against what he takes to be Hegel's claim that nature's apparent mastery is or will be vanquished by the greater mastery of mind or spirit. My contention here is that if Adorno's neo-darwinian understanding of the term 'natural history' has little to do with the Romantic natural history of plants, his critique of Hegel has everything to do with the status of natural history in Romantic writing and, in particular, Hegel's philosophy of nature. Specifically, Adorno invokes contingency and particularity to disturb Hegel's march of the world spirit over nature. In similar fashion, I argue the seeming or apparent proliferation of natural species disturbs the desire for absolute knowledge of taxonomy in Romantic natural history.

Adorno suggests what is at stake for him as well as Marx in the idea of a natural history that is surreptitiously taken up by the capitalist to argue that the development of capital is natural, inevitable, like nature itself. Supplanting nature with spirit, Hegel retains the logic of a natural, inevitable mastery even as he lodges that mastery in the world spirit's eventual domination of nature, particulars, and human individuals. Throughout the section of *Negative Dialectics* that engages Hegel, Adorno argues for a dialectics from below that would challenge the Hegelian domination of spirit, abstraction, universals, even species, over what is, at least for Adorno's Hegel, below these categories: particulars and individual beings. Adorno notes that these concerns are found throughout Hegel's philosophy, but especially in these works: *The Philosophy of Right* (210); *The Phenomenology of Spirit* (420); *The Philosophy of Nature* (2: 202–217); and the *Logic* (Adorno *Dialectics* 301).

What interests me in Adorno's critique is the suggestion that the concepts of the individual and the particular which Hegel sought to gather up into the world spirit (*Aufhebung*) might resist being so gathered up. For nature, that resistance would seem to be found in contingency—those random, unexpected events that work against plotting nature's history as necessarily evolving or devolving. For human individuals, that resistance would register human freedom to be, pace Hegel, at least potentially free from the abstracting domain of the world spirit. In tracking the logic of Marx's critique of Hegel, Adorno seems to hint that contingency might play some role in such a revolt. Indeed, what Adorno has to say about saving particulars from the maw of the universalizing world spirit touches repeatedly on key and irresolvable problems in Romantic natural history. Let me be clear here: I do not the opposition between particulars and universals resolvable, by Hegel's or any other method. I also grant that reading Roman-

tic natural history via Adorno risks being either scandalously or dubiously tangential, a glancing off Adorno to engage a subject or an understanding of a subject that did not interest him. I pursue this tangent nonetheless because it belongs to a history and an antagonism that are buried just beneath Hegel and may still be secretly at work in Adorno's cautious interest in contingency, in what cannot be made to fit the grip of the world spirit or other universalizing abstractions. What is compelling here is the formal resemblance between Adorno's dialectical notice of the particular, the individual, and the contingent over against the world spirit and its allies and the tendency of Romantic discourse about natural history to legislate away the rule of categories on the other.

My point of departure is a comment Hans Blumenberg makes about Francis Bacon and the new science. For Bacon, and to some extent probably for Blumenberg as well, the new science of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in the West is distinguished by its theoretical 'seriousness,' which eschews naive fascination with the curiosities of nature for a more disciplined inquiry that seeks itself to discipline curiosity, accident, and contingency. That inquiry transforms what appears to be accidental, a play of nature, into 'particularly instructive instances of universal lawfulness, the *miracula naturae* being analyzed as cases of the *concurus rarus* of *forma* and *lex*' (Blumenberg 614; Bacon, *Novum Organum* in *Works* 1: 280–282). The practice of subjugating the particular, and in particular the unruly particular, to the law is obvious here. This subjugation is the conceptual move that Adorno repeatedly attacks.

That attack winds its way through a second dialogue in *Negative Dialectics* with Marx on agency, conceptual abstractions, and personifications as the false face of abstraction. Marx and Engels had argued, against Hegel's doctrine of a world spirit as, in effect, the work of history, that 'history does nothing, does not "possess vast wealth", does not "fight battles"! It is man, rather, the real, living man who does all that, who does possess and fight; it is not "history" that uses man as a means to pursue its ends, as if it were a person apart. History is nothing but the activity of man pursuing his ends' (Marx and Engels 211). Adorno partially dissents from Marx on the question of who or what history is by supposing that history has or has accrued agency. Adorno makes this claim with a rueful sense that history as a category or abstract idea should not have acquired so much power: 'history is equipped with those qualities [of action and agency] because society's law of motion has for thousands of years been abstracting from its individual subjects, degrading them to mere execution, mere partners in social wealth and social struggle. The debasement was as real as the fact that on the other hand there would be nothing without individuals and their spontaneities' (Adorno *Dialectics* 304). The contest that Adorno describes here, of abstracting agency from individuals and vesting them in abstractions like history can only, it seems, be disturbed by individuals and their spontaneities which Hegel has debased by vesting them in the negating, abstracting work of the world spirit. The problem, as Adorno puts it, is that the world spirit operates over men's heads and through men's heads': for although the world spirit needs living existence and actions, it is finally not interested in life forms except as means to the end that is spirit.

Adorno's debate with Hegel evidently belongs to a broader inquiry concerning the rise of modernity, where the contest between singularity, individuals, and abstract

schemas marks, many have argued, the as yet unresolved project of modernity, whether the arena in question is scientific, political, or philosophical. Thus, for example, when Laura Otis identifies modernity's cultural and scientific anxieties about membranes or identities that might be porous to disease or, more phantasmatically, the 'Other,' she argues that one trigger for these anxieties was the rise of the individual as an entity with new status and thus a new purchase on having a place or authority in culture (Otis 12). What specifically concerns Adorno is Hegel's philosophical determination to put individuals and particulars into a system where their concerns and claims are taken up by the world spirit in a process of negation that, Hegel asserted, would save and elevate individuals.

In the discourse of Romantic natural history, this problem takes the form of discussions of specimens and their categorical relation to species and competing taxonomic systems. As writers on natural history tried to insist on their own version of Bacon's preference for law over curiosities or tricks of nature against the still present lure of such curiosities, they were increasingly thwarted by the abundance of newly discovered plants and species that challenged existing or preferred classification, and by 'monsters' or irregular forms that refused to inhabit the categories available to them.

The Romantic moment in this debate includes two, opposed events: on the one hand, Romantic naturalists and books eagerly presented one systematic or another and assigned specimens and species to them in an effort to master the influx of exotic plants by fixing them in a schematic with more familiar, native plants. On the other, Romantic figurative playfulness worked havoc on the rigid conceptual apparatus of Linnaeus' massively influential 'system of Nature,' as he called it. More or less coincident with the French Revolution, French taxonomists and naturalists Jussieu, Adanson, De Candolle, and Buffon developed a systematics of the so-called Natural Orders that rejected the ground of the Linnean system: the claim that plants could be identified and ordered taxonomically wholly by reference to their reproductive parts, the numbers of stamens and pistils. The systematic based on the Natural Orders preferred a more expansive, branched morphological attention to traits of plants that suggested several affiliations within and across genera.

Something like this play of formal resemblances may, I suggest, open the way to a third inquiry about the estranged, qualified domain of Romantic freedom in Adorno's critique of Hegel. That is to say, if nature is not rigidly mappable by one set of criteria, but rather an arena where different affiliations may obtain simultaneously, as well as an arena where some individuals may not fit at all, it might be said to operate outside the vice-grip of Hegelian systematics. Or one might argue that a wholly systemized or wholly inevitable system of development called nature is a threat to Romantic freedom, unless there is some sense in which nature or figures of nature bite back at the systems designed to contain them both.

Adorno would probably have been chary about this notion because it makes much of individuals and neglects—naively, romantically—the pull of a series of collective actions that may inform what appears to be the actions of individuals even, ironically, when those actions are also seemingly directed by individuals against other individuals. The example he uses is the moment when a 'dissenter' from Nazi mythology finds the

Gestapo at his door at 6 a.m. It would be pointless, Adorno notes, to argue with that dissenter that the Gestapo is only the immediate cause of his likely suffering, that other mediate events, such as the installation of the Nazi party machine 'in every branch of administration' 'shattered' the Weimar republic and set in motion all those events that led eventually to 'the brute fact of the governmental onslaught which fascism looses on the individual' (Adorno *Dialectics* 301). That is to say, one can argue all one wishes about individual agency, but it is essential to recognize that in history as we know it, individuals may well be subjected to a power whose antecedents are many and whose appearance on the stage of history looks inevitable by the time it arrives at one's doorstep in the form of the Gestapo. So, suggests Adorno, does Hegel's world spirit look inevitable as it emerges triumphant over the successive negativities that are, in one sense, the great engine and hope of Hegelian thought.

Nonetheless, Adorno goes on to propose that dialectics might or does reverse the direction Hegel finally gave it by becoming a 'dialectics [that] is a challenge from below.' Adorno finds that challenge in 'the philosophical call for immersion in detail.' Whereas in Hegel such an immersion is preempted by 'that spirit which from the outset was posited as total and absolute' (Adorno *Dialectics* 303), Adorno would rehabilitate those details, particularities, and individuals that Hegel diverted into spirit, or put under the shadow of abstraction in service of spirit. Adorno cites Benjamin to emphasize this gesture: 'When Benjamin writes that the smallest cell of visualized reality outweighs the rest of the world, this line already attests to the self-consciousness of our present state of experience, and it does so with particular authenticity because it was shaped outside the domain of the so-called "great philosophical issues" which a changed concept of dialectics calls us to distrust' (Adorno *Dialectics* 303). What is thereby changed, in short, is the source and thus home of the dialectic: below, with details, with individuals, with particularities.

Adorno's view of what goes wrong in the Hegelian dialectic is acute: instead of resting negativity on the shoulders of the world spirit where Adorno suggests that it belonged, negativity was shifted to 'the shoulders of the ones who must obey that spirit—ie individuals and particulars' (Adorno *Dialectics* 304). Had negativity remained on the shoulders of the spirit, it would have kept alive the dialectic between an abstracting spirit and resisting particulars. Placed on the shoulders of individuals and particulars, it pressed the life out of them. Adorno's lingering hope for something different is vested in particulars: 'The instants in which a particular frees itself without in turn, by its own particularity, confining others—these instants are anticipations of the unconfined, and such solace radiates from the earlier bourgeoisie [that is the early period of the French Revolution] until its late period' (Adorno *Dialectics* 306).

Adorno's argument with Hegel continually finds reinforcement in Marx's ironic critique of Hegel, particularly with regard to the disreputable work of abstract figure in the service of systems, be they Hegelian or capitalist. There might of course be any number of touchdowns in *Das Kapital* for invoking this critique, but the one Adorno settles on is Marx's comment on how personification gives the capitalist an aura of respectability that is, in effect, a figurative smokescreen. Marx snarls, 'only as a personification of capital is the capitalist respectable. As such a personification he shares the

absolute enrichment drive with the hoarder of treasure. But what appears in the hoarder as an individual mania is in the capitalist an effect of the social mechanism, in which he is but a cog' (Marx, 1: 739). Elsewhere Marx is sharper still on the quid pro quo that obtains between personified capital and individuals when he notes that capitalism 'entails the personification of things' and the 'reification [*Versachlichung*] of persons' (1: 739, 1054). This is, to be sure, materiality or thingness working against particular humans, rather than in concert with them as another version of the 'immersion in detail' that Hegel slyly called for, then discarded.

Here I want to make an intervention in the Marx–Adorno animus against personification, an animus driven, I suggest, by a limited, Hegelian-driven understanding of its relation to abstraction. That understanding is suggested in a remark Hegel makes in the *Philosophy of Right* which Adorno finds irritating yet also vindicating because it hands Hegel's argument over to his detractors. In the *Philosophy of Right*, Hegel writes that 'the form of the right as of a duty and a law strikes it as a dead, cold letter and a shackle; for it does not recognize itself in it, hence does not recognize itself as free, because the law is reason in the matter, and reason does not permit a feeling to warm itself by its own particularity' (Hegel, *Werke* 7: 28f, as translated by Adorno *Dialectics* 310). Why Adorno asks, should not 'a feeling warm itself by its own particularity'? Or, to put this point differently: why should reason be so averse to a feeling's operations, its capacity as a figured being, to warm itself by its own particularity? Adorno suggests that this is no error in Hegel's argument, but an inadvertent exposure of the polarity, the absolute division that exists between the abstract coldness of reason and the peculiarly anthropomorphic relation between feeling and particularity as both come in from the cold winds of Hegelian dialectic.

But what if we could imagine personification working, albeit illicitly, on the side of particularity, working, as it were, to undermine the abstractive, death-dealing energies of the Hegelian system? I grant that I am giving added figurative weight to Hegel's prohibition against warmth, feeling, and particularity, but I do so in part to heighten our sense of the work that such figures can do, despite the highly and widely influential eighteenth-century insistence that personifications are always only lifeless abstractions.

My claims here are two. First, for the purposes of my argument about Adorno and Romanticism, I imagine the Hegelian 'world spirit' as incarnated in the implicit, rational engine of Romantic natural history bent on its doomed taxonomic project of classifying the world. For whether the apologist for that project was Linnaeus, Alexander von Humboldt or any of the English botanists for whom taxonomic questions trumped most others during the Romantic era, the organic figure of all of nature named and codified within and by a complex system of analogies from clime to clime masks a schematic desire that in its own way operates on particulars with some of the same designs Adorno attributes to Hegel's brief for world spirit. Second, Hegel's dismissive statement that reason will not let 'a feeling warm itself by its own particularity' (the curious literalness of this phrase is lost in Knox's English translation) invites some restive thinking about personifications in the discourse of Romantic natural history that might be warm rather than cold. As luck would have it, there are some, and they owe much of what they are able to do to Linnaeus himself.

In the original Latin, Linnaeus offered a sexual taxonomy that was, as it were, prodigiously sexual. The basic division of all plants presented twenty-four classes; each named (in Linnean Latin) according to the number of 'male' stamens or stamina a plant displayed. Within each class there were orders, named and determined by the number of 'female' pistils the plant displayed. Plants that uncooperatively refused to display either stamens or pistils were lumped together in the twenty-fourth class, the *Cryptogamia* (Stearn xvi; Korner 14–31). It was both awkward and subversively instructive that this last class included so many kinds of plants, among them ferns, mosses, algae and fungi. Evidently, the gender privilege here of male classes over the female orders matched the established order of the patriarchy, a point not lost on recent commentators.

Linnaeus's descriptive tags took the question of sex still further. The first class, *Monandria*, he defined safely in Latin (at least until the translations started to appear) as 'one husband in marriage.' Matched with one pistil, the plant would have been identified as a thoroughly monogamous, heterosexual union of one man and one woman: i.e., *Monandria monogynia*. After this, the sexual lives of plants gets a good deal more kinky and more interesting and at times highly stratified. Some examples: *Pentandria* would be five husbands in one marriage (though husbands could be equal or some subordinate in rank to others); *Pentandria trigynia*, would be five husbands and three wives, and so on. The possibilities were, of course deliciously unfaithful to the patriarchal view of marriage and authority. Not surprisingly, English translators of Linnaeus were increasingly loathe to translate the quite remarkable versions of marriage Linnaeus identified with each class and order. By naming male and female parts 'husbands' and 'wives,' Linnaeus thus provided a more than adequate basis for troping the sex life of plants. Two late eighteenth-century writers, the orientalist William Jones and the radical thinker and popularizer Erasmus Darwin, the irrepressible grandfather of Charles, took the figurative license Linnaeus had quite remarkably made available.

Jones's 1784 orientalist send-up, 'The Enchanted Fruit; or, The Hindu Wife,' pursues Linnean sexual variety in an appropriately exotic setting. As if to keep religious readers off his scent, Jones subtitled the poem, with orientalist tongue in cheek, 'An Antediluvian Tale Written in the Province of Bahar.' The tale, we are told, illustrates the ancient Brahmin motto, 'what pleaseth, hath no law forbidden.' Its subject is a marriage between one woman and five men, which the poem characterizes as: 'sev'ral husbands, free from strife,/Link'd fairly to a single wife!' (Jones 83). Jones immediately casts this happy arrangement as a botanist's riddle:

Thus Botanists, with eyes acute
To see prolifick dust minute,
Taught by their learned northern *Brahmen* [aka Linnaeus]
To class by *pistil* and by *stamen*,
Produced from nature's rich dominion,
Flow'rs *Polyandrian Monogynian*,
Where embryo blossoms, fruits, and leaves
Twenty prepare, and *ONE* receives. (Jones 65–72, 83)

This category is, in fact, much more outrageous than the actual union of five husbands and one slightly erring wife whose adventures the poem narrates, since the Linnean term *polyandrian* refers to a class of hermaphroditic plants that has many stamens or any number above twenty.

In 1789, Darwin published 'Loves of the Plants,' a verse chronicle of the Linnean system that he later incorporated in *The Botanic Garden* as Part II (1791). This poem scandalously and hilariously offers personifications of plants the sexual congress of which is increasingly irregular. More emphatically and extensively than Jones had done, Darwin animated all those marriages by presenting them as indecorous, and very warm, personifications. What interests me about his poetic rendition of the Linnaean system is the way Darwin's presentation undermines the logic of closed systems, be they patriarchal or sexual. For Linnaeus enfolded and attempts to normalize under the sign of heterosexual monogamy what Darwin foregrounds: a pattern of sexual reproduction that proliferates exponentially such that it insistently risks or defies the theme of legitimate, single partner heterosexuality that Linnaeus wanted to emphasize, despite the fact that he himself, as Lond Schiebinger wryly notes, could not imagine the category of the female in botany (or the male for that matter) without specifying both in terms of marital relations (Schiebinger 25–26), even when the logic of his system required talking about several husbands (usually depicted as 'brothers,' as if the familial tie legitimated the fact of polygamy) or, less troublingly for Linnaeus, several submissive 'wives.' Darwin's notice of plant 'wives' or even a single 'wife' who were not submissive or were, worse still, incestuously related to their male partners neatly countermands the patriarchal desire and authority of the Linnaean system.

Darwin begins with the Linnean archetype, the Canna, called Cane or Indian Reed, a plant which has one stamen and one pistil:

First the tall CANNA listed his curled brow
Erect to heaven, and lights his nuptial vow;
The virtuous pair, in milder regions born,
Dread the rude shaft of Autumn's icy morn;
Round the chill fair he folds his crimson vest,
And clasps the timorous beauty to his breast.
(Darwin, 'Loves of the Plants' in *Botanic Garden Part II* 3–4)

Nothing is out of line here: men are erect and protective, women chilly and timorous. Thereafter Darwin's account immediately heads down a very slippery slope from two husband brothers and one wife to ten husbands (still exemplary of brotherly love) and one wife, and beyond. Inevitably, it turns out that single 'wives' able to sustain such marital attention have erotic resources of their own. The freckled Iris, Darwin explains, 'owns a fiercer flame,/And *three* unjealous husbands wed the dame' (8). Among the clandestine plants is the female plant *Osmunda* who, like her male Shakespearean counterpart, hides her identity and, further, her offspring. The *Lychnis* is represented by a male plant with 'ten males' and a female plant with five, the mating game of which Darwin describes:

But when soft hours on breezy pinions move,
 And smiling May attunes her lute to love,
 Each wanton beauty, trick'd in all her grace,
 Shakes the bright dew-drops from her blushing face;
 In gay undress displays her rival charms
 And call her wondering lovers to her arms. (13)

Immediately following this vignette Darwin presents the plant *Gloriosa Superba*, whose six males fertilize one female pistil on the same plant. Note, though, the sexual dynamic of Darwin's lines describing this union:

Proud GLORIOSA led three chosen swains,
 The blushing captives of her virgin chains.—
 —When Time's rude hand a bark of wrinkles spread
 Round her weak limbs, and silver'd o'er her head,
 Three other youths her riper years engage,
 The flatter'd victims of her wily age. (13–14)

From this erotic scene of a coercive female who remains sexually dominant in old age, Darwin turns to the incestuous female *Ninon*, whose appalled stamen 'son' kills himself in horror. If at times the males of these plant species convey their wonder or horror at the sight of their sexually aggressive female partners, or the narrator suggests his disapprobation of females like the 'harlot-band' of five sisters in the plant *Silene* or *Catchfly*, the fact that Darwin goes on and on suggests that even the quicksilver categories of 'naked ladies,' or of 'Viragoes' or 'feminine males' who bear their 'trembling [male] lovers in their arms' (20) exemplify a valuable principle. As I read Darwin's poem, that principle is a differing and differential sexual energy that insures numerous varieties of sexual congress and reproduction. With all these couplings, and the production of offspring that include 'vegetable monsters,' there can be no end to the display of this botanic garden.

As I understand the implications of Jones's and Darwin's verse send-ups of the Linnean sexual system, they engender figurative mayhem by arguing that figures, even personifications, are alive with a wayward because tropological particularity. So understood, such figures let loose the possibility of spontaneous and contingent eruptions at odds with systems and their comptrollers. To return this point to Marx, where Adorno's meditation on personification began, these botanical personifications do not operate as Marx says the personification of capital does. Instead of providing a cover for the wholly unnatural accumulation of capital, these figures diffuse botanical identity, reversing the dialectic so that their particularity from below suggests endless figural permutations in a taxonomic system that is intended to fix, not release particulars, even as the Hegelian world spirit is, in Adorno's view, the engine that takes particulars up only in order to swallow them up, masticating them so thoroughly that they lose the edge of particular being they would need to resist this putatively higher resolution under the aegis of spirit.

Adorno's case against the Hegelian world spirit on behalf of particulars and individuals and dialectics from below is perplexed at every turn by the need to conceptualize, to categorize, a necessity that Hegel makes the work of spirit over nature. What requires

scrutiny here, Adorno insists, is the way Hegel argues for the preservation of individuality by a *via negativa* that finally absorbs the individual. Its other name and game is domination, defined in *Negative Dialectics* as 'the gaping difference between individual interests and the whole that is their abstract aggregate' (310). Whereas Hegel insists, in Adorno's words, that 'the power of the self-realizing self-realizing universal is ... identical with the nature of individuals' (Adorno 311), Adorno argues to the contrary. Rather individuals make the alien cause of the universal their own simply to survive, but in doing so they also convey the appearance of reconciliation, which Hegel corrupts into the idea of the universal (311).

There is no retreat for Adorno into a naïve belief in the ascendancy of the individual, the great if flawed myth of modernity. Yet Adorno also recognizes that Hegel's insistence on the law of the universal which reason supposedly insures is in fact an irrational rationality because it appears to promote 'an equality [between particulars and "their" universals] in which differences perish secretly.' We might oppose the irrational, disseminating path of figures that give the slip to the grasp of the world spirit, even as differences in nature evade fixed taxonomies, to the irrational rational logic of Hegelian law. Even so, it is essential, Adorno observes, to note that the specter of a 'universal history' cannot be simply wished away, for specter or not, its instantiations in modernity are all too evident, as in, for example, the trajectory that leads through history from the slingshot to the atomic bomb (317).

I conclude by returning to the other thread of Adorno's argument, his interest in a wayward, exfoliating contingency that might operate on behalf of particulars to check the work of the world spirit as a universalizing dominatrix. If Hegel puts the individual, as Adorno phrases it, under a spell (327), what resources might there be to release that spell, with 'backward mutterings of dis severing power'? (Milton, *Comus*, l. 817; Keats, *Letters* 1: 342). One needs, perhaps, chance remainders—undigested bits with a disseminating impulse akin to that of Romanticism's wayward botanical figures.

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